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Outcome of the International Symposium on Integrated Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourteenth session the outcome of the International Symposium on Integrated Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (see annex).

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Annex

Outcome of the International Symposium on Integrated Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals

Nanchang, China, 10-12 May 2005

I. Introduction

1. The International Symposium on Integrated Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals was held in Nanchang, China, from 10 to 12 May 2005. It was organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and was hosted by the provincial government of Jiangxi province, China. Some 150 participants from government agencies, international organizations, the scientific community and research institutions, the business sector and civil society groups from both developed and developing countries attended the Symposium.

2. The meeting was organized in 12 thematic sessions featuring over 30 speakers. Discussions were based on case studies and addressed the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

3. The commitment of the people and the government of Jiangxi province to the goals of sustainable development was recognized by all participants.

II. Thematic discussions

A. National sustainable development strategies

4. National sustainable development strategies are an important tool for integrated sustainable development. Such strategies have proven successful when they integrate economic development, environmental protection and social equity and take into account international agreements and the potential for international cooperation. They can integrate policies and programmes of various ministries and efforts at the national, provincial and local levels and involve the private sector, academia, the scientific and technological communities, community organizations and non-governmental organizations. The Internet can be a valuable tool for involving a large number of people and different organizations and for exchanging information.

5. National sustainable development strategies should be based on sound science and should have clear targets and indicators, with provisions for monitoring progress towards the targets, such as through annual reports on selected indicators. The United Nations has prepared a set of indicators of sustainable development for use by countries in developing national indicators. Governments can also prepare sustainable development plans for their own operations, both to reduce the environmental impacts of their own operations and as an example to others.

B. Contribution of science and technology to sustainable development

6. The transition to sustainable development is a knowledge-intensive learning process. Without access to science and technology and the capacity to use it, the goals and targets of sustainable development cannot be achieved. It is important to employ an interdisciplinary approach to research and development from which social, economic and life sciences can work together in order to ensure a balanced consideration of the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development. Research partnerships should be established that employ the complementary strength of modern science and traditional knowledge and that work across scientific disciplines and cultural boundaries. It is important to establish closer relationships between the world of science and the world of policy, thus enhancing both the production of policy-relevant research results and the credibility of policy decisions that are supported by sound scientific evidence. New methods for long-term analysis that address uncertainties and vulnerabilities and use sound scientific evidence can be a useful tool for more robust policy decision-making.

7. Technological innovations are the key to environmentally sustainable economic growth and improved standards of living. The introduction of new technologies, for example, allowed the Jiangxi Copper Corporation, which is China's biggest copper production base, to make copper products of high quality on its own, reducing reliance on the sale of copper metal. Simultaneously, the Jiangxi Copper Corporation introduced technological innovations developed in-house to advance the reuse of waste water and the use of gas and residues to extract rare and noble metals. The introduction of the new technology resulted in enhanced profitability and productivity.

C. Sustainable land and water development

8. In China, as in many developing countries, high population densities and population growth have led to high and increasing pressure on land, resulting in deforestation, cultivation of fragile lands, overgrazing and soil erosion, which can lead to reduced agricultural yields, increased water runoff and flooding, exacerbated by settlement on lake and river flood plains. Jiangxi province has been addressing these problems through its Mountains, Rivers and Lakes Programme, which involves large-scale reforestation of upland watersheds and resettlement of populations away from flood-prone areas. Waste water treatment facilities have also been introduced to improve water quality in rivers and lakes.

9. Programmes for sustainable agriculture, rural development and poverty reduction in China have included the promotion of biodigesters to generate gas for cooking, lighting and heating from animal manure, while producing high-quality organic fertilizer for crops. This has increased agricultural yields while reducing harmful environmental impacts from the use of agricultural chemicals. The Government has been promoting such ecological agriculture through partial subsidies for the biodigesters and related improvements. Information campaigns for farmers and improved technologies, such as multicropping and intercropping, are also needed to make agriculture more sustainable.

10. Desertification is a major problem in many developing countries, including in north-western China, where, as a result of deforestation and overgrazing, sand and

dust storms are common. Measures to address this problem include bans on logging in sensitive areas and returning unsustainable farmland to grassland and forest, with compensation to farmers. In China and elsewhere, windbreaks and forest belts are being planted to reduce wind erosion and sand and dust storms. Measures are also needed to provide alternative livelihoods to people in poor areas subject to desertification.

D. Sustainable development of forests

11. Forests play a critical role in sustainable development, including economic development, environmental protection, social development and poverty reduction. Environmental damage has been caused by excessive logging, while opposition to such activity has sometimes limited economic development. While the protection of forest cover and forest stock is important, it is also necessary to improve forest productivity, which is lower in China than in developed countries.

12. Forests and forest products can also play an important role in addressing climate change and global warming. Forests are important for carbon storage, and wood products release lower amounts of carbon dioxide than plastics, cement or aluminum, in addition to being renewable. Trading carbon emissions credits and other mechanisms could serve to support sustainable forestry.

E. Energy and sustainable development

13. A major environmental problem in some developing countries, including China, is air pollution and acid rain resulting from the burning of coal. This problem is being addressed through the use of cleaner fuels in cities, but new technologies are also needed, such as coal gasification, together with renewable energies. Since energy efficiency in developing countries is low compared with developed countries, stronger energy conservation measures are needed, together with improved enforcement of existing laws and regulations.

14. Urban air pollution from vehicles is a growing problem in developing countries with rapid economic growth, such as China and other Asian countries. Measures are needed to manage the growth in the number of vehicles in large cities, to reduce emissions and to promote more sustainable modes of transportation, such as railways.

F. Sustainable industrialization

15. Industrialization needs to be brought in line with the principles of sustainable development. Pollution of the air, water and soil resulting from unsustainable manufacturing processes in many countries, including China, is causing immense environmental and human health problems. Production processes that are more efficient in the use of resources, materials and energy are needed. Product development should be guided by a life-cycle approach, with focus on the reuse and recycling of products. In advancing towards sustainable industrialization, access to and use of cleaner production technologies and methods are vital.

16. Government policies can provide incentives, such as subsidies and tax incentives, to encourage companies to make production processes and products more sustainable. Those incentives may be combined with regulatory instruments to guide the process of sustainable industrialization, where necessary. Other measures at the disposal of Governments include requirements for environmental impact assessments, environmental accountability and environmental education to raise awareness of the benefits of sustainable industrialization.

G. Industrial parks

17. Industrial parks provide an institutional context for co-locating related enterprises and improving resource sharing and interaction. Industrial parks can create jobs and speed up the process of industrialization. In addition, they facilitate the monitoring of environmental impacts. Such parks can provide a short-cut for solving environmental problems, safeguarding public health and leveraging benefits for industrial enterprises.

18. Various challenges have to be met relating to industrial parks. First, innovative ways of environmental management should be carried out, so that environmental capacity can be utilized more efficiently. Second, concentrated pollution control should be encouraged to prevent widely scattered emission of pollutants. Third, the paradigm of recycling should be carried out in industrial parks to reorient industrialization. Fourth, environmental indicators need to be established. Finally, regional environmental impact assessments should be conducted for industrial parks.

H. Sustainable urban development

19. The reshaping of urban waterfronts is one example of promoting long-term sustainability in urban areas. Redesigning ports and downtown areas in many harbour cities around the world, together with the introduction of innovative shipping technologies, has provided new opportunities for reallocating waterfront areas for public recreation. This has led, for example, to the complete reshaping of the waterfront in Shanghai.

I. Policy instruments for sustainable development

20. Sustainable development can be achieved most effectively, the costs of environmental protection reduced and public support broadened through the use of a variety of policy instruments, including regulations, economic incentives and flexible mechanisms. Emissions trading, technical assistance and social instruments, such as public information, can all be used towards this end. The most effective mix of policies will depend on the objective — administrative and enforcement requirements and capacities and the political, economic and cultural context. In general, regulations can ensure that basic standards are met by all; flexible mechanisms can reduce the costs of compliance and broaden support; economic incentives can reward those whose performance exceeds the minimum standards; technical assistance can assist those who are willing but not sure how to comply; and public information can support informed consumer choices and public support

for sustainable development policies. In China, licences for the discharge of pollution and the closing down of highly polluting industries using obsolete technologies have been used to reduce industrial pollution.

J. Industrial ecology and sustainable consumption

21. Industrial ecology has emerged as an important approach to improving industrial productivity while reducing environmental impacts. A wide variety of tools and concepts have been developed and applied in both developed and developing countries.

K. General approaches to sustainable development

22. Sustainable development in China will require further infrastructure development, industrial development and restructuring, increased energy and resource efficiency and the development of new and more sustainable technologies. The concept of a recycling economy, including agriculture and industrial production and household consumption, can also help to conserve natural resources and reduce waste and pollution. Since 1993, China has adopted a scientific approach to development by emphasizing greater efficiency through advanced and new technologies and by improving the quality of the work force.

23. International cooperation and the exchange of information are needed to support the efforts of developing countries towards sustainable development. Developed countries and international organizations are prepared to assist those efforts through various forms of financial and technical assistance.